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THE RURAL SUCCESSION MYTH

Occupational careers and household formation of peasants' and farmers' offspring around 1800¹

Abstract

Two cases considering the farmers in Eastern Marne in Groningen and the peasants in Oosterhesselen in Drenthe in the period 1740-1860 show that family succession on farmsteads was less common in the Netherlands than is often assumed and was certainly less widespread than in other north-western European countries. Analysing the careers of farmers' and peasants' children in the period around 1800 confirms that the acquisition of the parental holding was far less important in rural household formation than generally suggested. During the period of rapid population growth studied, the children of those with smaller holdings had particularly limited chances of family succession or of acquiring a farmstead in a different way, and had very high chances of downward social mobility.

Passing farms within the family from one generation to the next seems to be the easiest way to secure the future for parents and at least one of their children: one child is provided with a stable position, and the parents are guaranteed some carefree years at the ends of their lives. As this rural succession system is assumed to be nearly general, rural household formation must have usually depended on the position of parents and the parents-in-law of the bride and groom, even more so in periods of limited population growth. Consequently, inheritance systems and the relations between consecutive generations of families play a significant role in historical arguments. They are, for instance, important in the debate over the Western European marriage pattern, which could partly be caused by people marrying late while waiting for paternal inheritances and positions.² In addition, three-generation households

1. Previous versions of this article were presented as papers at the ICHS conference in Amsterdam, August 2010, and at the Posthumus Conference in Antwerp, May 2011.

2. Compare: J. Hajnal, 'European marriage in perspective', in: D.V. Glass and D.E.C. Eversley (eds.), *Population in history. Essays in historical demography* (London 1965) 101-143; E.W. Hofstee, 'Regionale verscheidenheid in de ontwikkeling van het aantal geboorten in Nederland in de 2e helft van de 19e eeuw', *Akademiedagen VII* (KNAW) (Amsterdam 1954)

are usually interpreted as a means of transferring the holding to one specific successor, while the fragmentation of peasant land holdings is often related to the division of inheritances in freehold regions.³ These kinds of arguments seem to correspond very neatly with the 'common-sense' notion that family continuity on farms was automatic in the past, and that families had some kind of emotional attachment to the land cultivated by their ancestors.⁴

Micro-research usually supports the notion of rural family succession for northern and western Europe. In Belm in Westphalia (Germany) – not taking into account the roughly 60 per cent of households of smallholders and landless people – 87 per cent of the large and small farms went to related people between 1711 and 1860.⁵ In Neckarhausen (Germany) most plots of land sold went to relatives.⁶ In their study of two parishes in southern Sweden in the period 1720–1840, Dribe and Lundh also found only a few non-relatives and a lot of sons and daughters succeeding after the death of a widow or widower.⁷ Seen in this context, it is not surprising that most of the international literature on the transfer of farms is mainly preoccupied with the way parents passed the family farm to one of their children.⁸

59–106. See also: G. Fertig, 'The invisible chain: Niche inheritance and unequal social reproduction in preindustrial continental Europe', *The History of the Family* 8 (2003) 7–19.

3. B.J.P. van Bavel, *Manors and markets: Economy and society in the Low Countries, 500–1600* (Oxford 2010) 244–246, 285.

4. For instance: H. de Haan, *In the shadow of the tree. Kinship, property and inheritance among farm families* (Amsterdam 1994); R.F.A. Rorink, *Verbonden door de echte. Rechten en plichten van de horige boeren onder de Twentse landsheerlijke hoven tot 1811* (Almelo 1996) 193–196; J. Schlumbohm, 'The Land-family bond in peasant practice and in middle-class ideology: Evidence from the North-West German parish of Belm, 1650–1850' *Central European History* 27 (1994) 461–477. For England, this view has been challenged: A. MacFarlane, *The origins of english individualism; The family, property and social transition* (Oxford 1978), see also among others: G. Sreenivisan, 'The land-family bond at Earls Colne (Essex)', *Past and present* 131 (1991) 3–37; J. Whittle, 'Individualism and the Family-Land Bond: A reassessment of land transfer patterns among the English peasantry c 1270–1580', *Past and Present* 160:1 (1998) 25–63.

5. J. Schlumbohm, *Lebensläufe, Familien, Höfe; Die Bauern und Heuerleute des Osnabrückischen Kirchspiels Belm in proto-industrieller Zeit, 1650–1860* (Göttingen 1994) 385. Comparable results in: C. Fertig and G. Fertig, 'Bäuerliche Erbpraxis als Familienstrategie: Hofweitergabe im Westfalen des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts', in: S. Brakensiek, M. Stolleis and H. Wunder (eds.), *Generationengerechtigkeit. Normen und Praxis im Erb- und Ehegüterrecht 1500–1850. Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung, Beihefte* (Berlin 2006) 163–187.

6. D.W. Sabeian, *Property, production, and family in Neckarhausen, 1700–1870* (Cambridge 1990) 373–415.

7. M. Dribe and C. Lundh, 'Gender aspects of inheritance strategies and land transmission in rural Scania, Sweden, 1720–1840', *The History of the Family* 10 (2005) 293–308.

8. For example: L.F. Alos, 'When there was no male heir: the transfer of wealth through women in Catalonia (the pubilla)', *Continuity and Change* 20 (2005) 27–52; M.P. Arrizabalaga, 'Succession strategies in the Pyrenees in the 19th century: The Basque case', *The History of the Family* 10 (2005) 271–292; A. Fauve-Chamoux, 'Family reproduction and stem-

Research into long-term trends in inheritance practices and strategies for the Low Countries is scarce.⁹ However, it is clear that until the introduction of the Civil Code, there were substantial regional variations. From 1811 onwards, legal differences disappeared, but local traditions continued to influence the way the division of inheritances was executed. There are indications that during pre-modern periods of population growth and rising land prices, farmsteads could be divided between offspring, resulting in the fragmentation of holdings. Especially where peasants owned the land themselves, it is claimed that equal inheritances stimulated fragmentation in the late medieval period and later, as happened in Flanders and medieval Holland, a process which was usually accompanied by an important land market. Van Bavel et al. suggest that in the eastern Netherlands, in the medieval and early modern period, the use of freehold farms was indeed handed over to the next generation, with a strong preference for oldest sons as successors.¹⁰ The picture for leased land is more diffuse. Around 1600 the turnover of leaseholds was very high in, for instance, the Guelders river clay area, whereas in Holland the position of tenants was stronger, and continuity presumably greater.¹¹

Unfortunately, micro-research into the incidence of farm succession in the Netherlands in the past is still quite uncommon. This makes it difficult to verify the notion of rural family succession and to study in depth the influence of parental social position and paternal inheritances on the marriage behaviour and household formation of the next generation. Social mobility research, mostly dealing with the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, usually only compares the occupations of parents (fathers) and children (sons and sons-in-law),¹² without taking much other information into account, such as the number of siblings, their position in the family, parental remarriage, the moment of death of the parents, being a successor or not, and migration. However, a few recent publications seem to suggest that at least for the more

family system: From Pyrenean valleys to Norwegian farms', *The History of the Family* 11 (2006) 171-184; Fertig and Fertig, 'Bäuerliche Erbpraxis'.

9. I. DeVos, T. Lambrecht and R. Paping, 'The Low Countries, 1000-1750', in: E. Vanhaute et al. (eds.), *Making a living. Family, income and labour* (forthcoming: Turnhout 2011).

10. B.J.P. van Bavel, P. van Cruijnningen and E. Thoen, 'The Low Countries 1000-1750', in: B.J.P. van Bavel et al. (eds.), *Social relations. Property and power* (Turnhout 2010) 184.

11. Van Bavel, *Manors and markets*, 180-181; B.J.P. van Bavel and P. Hoppenbrouwers, 'Landholding and land transfer in the North Sea area (late Middle Ages-19th century)', in: idem (eds.), *Landholding and land transfer in the North Sea area* (Turnhout 2004) 31-32.

12. For instance: J. Dronkers and W.C. Ultee (eds.), *Verschuivende ongelijkheid in Nederland. Sociale gelaagdheid en mobiliteit* (Assen 1995); M.H.D. van Leeuwen and I. Maas, 'Sociale mobiliteit in de steden en op het platteland', in: K. Mandemakers and O. Boonstra (eds.), *De levensloop van de Utrechtse bevolking in de 19e eeuw* (Assen 1995) 103-127. Recent literature: J. Kok, K. Mandemakers and H. Bras, 'Van geboortebank tot collaboratory. Een reflectie op twintig jaar dataverzameling en onderzoek met de HSN', *Tijdschrift voor Sociale en Economische Geschiedenis* 6 (2009) 3-36, 11-13.

market-oriented coastal parts of the Netherlands, family succession on farms was far less universal in recent centuries.¹³ The comparative research for two Dutch rural areas in Groningen and Drenthe as case studies of the coastal farmers and inland peasants¹⁴ presented in this article results in the observation that even in relatively less market-oriented inland Drenthe around 1800, family succession on farms was far less common than the literature might lead us to expect. Therefore, there are strong indications that the story of almost universal rural family succession for farms is just a myth for the Netherlands, certainly in recent centuries.

Assuming universal rural family succession is indeed a myth, a whole new series of research questions arises. If the chance of succeeding parents was limited, what were the future social chances for the children of farmers? Did transferring a farm to outsiders improve the chances of all children or could family succession also turn out to be beneficial for the non-succeeding brothers and sisters? What alternatives were available for grown-up children to build up viable livings, taking into account the lack of direct succession possibilities? Were there striking differences between peasant and farmer societies? To answer these questions, we will concentrate on the first half of the nineteenth century. This is an interesting period because the Dutch rural population was just beginning to grow rapidly (about 1 percent a year), and an increasing number of rural households were forced to establish entirely new livelihoods, diminishing the significance of the rural family succession model even further. Our overall question in this article is: What were the

13. D. Damsma and J. Kok, 'Ingedroogde harten? Partnerkeuze en sociale reproductie van de Noord-Hollandse boerenstand in de negentiende en vroeg-twintigste eeuw', in: J. Kok and M.H.D. van Leeuwen (eds.), *Genegenheid en gelegenheid. Twee eeuwen partnerkeuze en huwelijk* (Amsterdam 2005) 285-308; R. Paping, 'Gender and the intergenerational transfer of property and social position in the 18th and early 19th century northern Dutch countryside', in: M. Durães, A. Fauve-Chamoux, L. Ferrer and J. Kok (eds.), *The transmission of well-being. Gendered marriage strategies and inheritance systems in Europe (17th-20th centuries)* (Bern 2009) 291-313. P. Brusse, *Overleven door ondernemen. De agrarische geschiedenis van de Over-Betuwe 1650-1850* (Wageningen 1999) 177-182, also points at the often limited continuity of families on farms. A tentative count based on his Appendix (pp. 413-434) containing some larger leasehold farm histories in 1600-1855 suggest that 30 percent of the successors were sons, 7 percent daughters, 7 percent other relatives, 25 percent new grooms of a widow and 32 percent were not directly related (N=118).

14. We use the term farmers for those working the land on their own account with the purpose of selling most of the produce on the market. We use the term peasants for those (mainly) working the land on their own account with the purpose of selling only a limited portion of their products on the market, or else to use it for payments in kind. Peasants also include users of land who supplement their agricultural income with activities outside agriculture. See also: P. Hoppenbrouwers and J.L. van Zanden (eds.), *Peasants into farmers? The transformation of rural economy and society in the Low Countries (Middle Ages-19th century) in the light of the Brenner debate* (Turnhout 2001).

consequences of the problem of the structural shortage of existing positions (niches) for the next generation, for families and their members?

We will focus on two case studies. On the one hand, the children of farmers in the Eastern Marne as part of the clay districts of Groningen were studied as an example of the coastal region. Around 1800, Groningen farmers had already been very market-oriented for centuries, and they had strong ownership rights over their land. The limited increase in the number of farms resulted in a process of rapid proletarianization. On the other hand, we investigated the children of peasants in Oosterhesselen in the sandy area of Drenthe as examples of an inland region. In Drenthe, rural society was still relatively traditional and less market-oriented. Farmers were either tenants or freeholders, and the number of – mostly small – farms increased, though proletarianization remained limited. Both societies were not only confronted by their own structural economic circumstances and developments,¹⁵ they could also have had different cultural ideas determining farm succession strategies.

As a starting point we assembled detailed information on farms and families for both cases using a number of government lists from 1806-1807 containing information on the size of all the farms.¹⁶ The databases for both Oosterhesselen and the Eastern Marne were constructed in two parts. Firstly, a fairly complete genealogical reconstruction of the families in charge of farms around 1807 was compiled. The lives of the children were usually followed until their deaths, wherever they had migrated to.¹⁷ The official occupations of the children, preferably some five years after marriage, were mostly derived from the population administration (the *Burgerlijke Stand*). Unfortunately, these sources do not provide information on the size of the farms. Secondly, we used a reconstruction of the farm histories, supplying detailed information about precisely which couples were in charge of each farm over the period 1740-1860. For the reconstructions we used all kinds of available sources: tax registers; public notaries' records; registrations of births, deaths and marriages by church and state; the land registry (*kadaster*); personal archives of farmers; and others. Combining these two lines permitted us to gain insight at a detailed level into all aspects of succession, household formation and social opportunities in the two rural areas studied.

15. J.L. van Zanden, *De economische ontwikkeling van de Nederlandse landbouw in de negentiende eeuw, 1800-1914* (Utrecht 1985); R.F.J. Paping, "Voor een handvol stuivers". *Werken, verdienen en besteden: de levensstandaard van boeren, arbeiders en middenstanders op de Groninger klei, 1770-1860* (Groningen 1995); J. Bieleman, *Boeren op het Drentse zand 1600-1910* (Wageningen 1987).

16. Drents Archief, Oude Statenarchieven, inv. no. 1623; Groninger Archieven, Archieven Gewestelijk Besturen, inv. no. 438-444.

17. Internet sources such as Genlias, Allegroningers and Drenlias were particularly helpful.

In this article we will first explain the differences between the two rural areas. Then we will describe the transfer of farms over the period 1740-1860, proving that family succession was less common than often presumed. In the rest of this article, we will analyse the occupational careers of the children of farmers and peasants against this background of limited family succession.

Farmers (Groningen) and peasants (Drenthe)

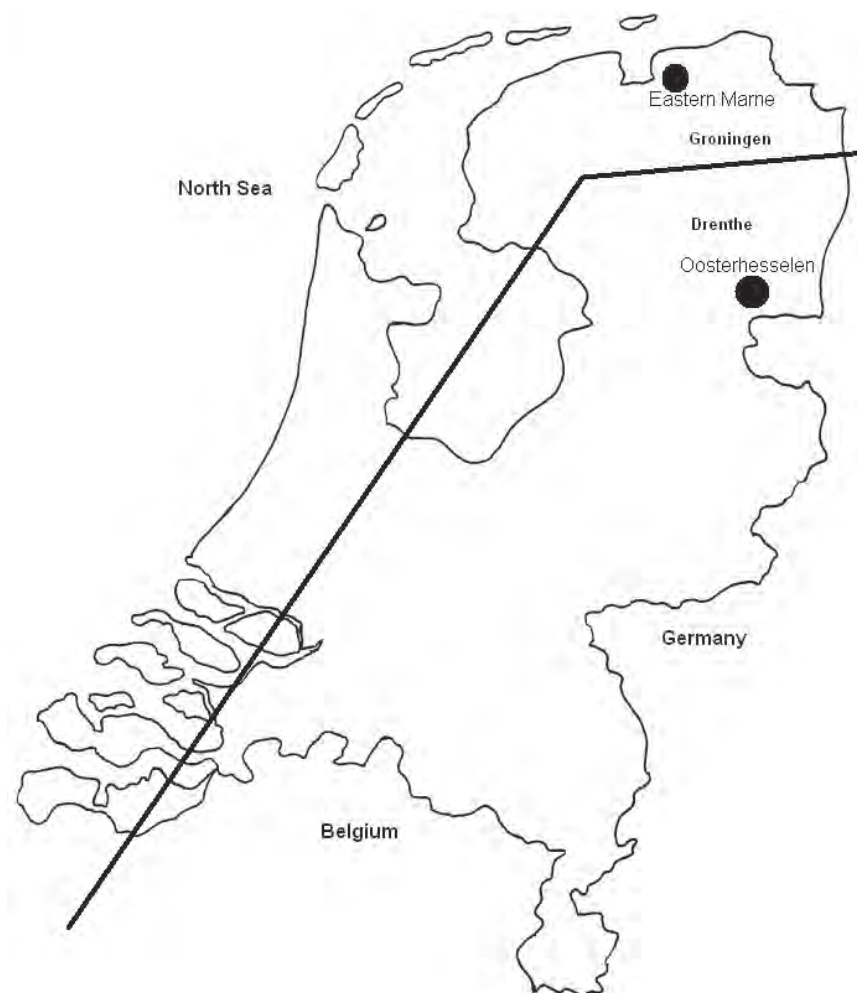
It is important to recall that very different agricultural systems coexisted in the early-modern and nineteenth-century Netherlands. In general, leaving aside the proto-industrial regions, two ideal types of rural societies can be discerned, differing in many respects: a very market-oriented type mainly found in the coastal provinces, and a less market-oriented model usually found in the inland provinces.¹⁸ Many Dutch rural societies naturally lay somewhere between these two ideal types.

From the sixteenth until the early nineteenth century, the Dutch coastal region was one of the wealthiest parts of the world. The provinces of Holland, Zeeland, Friesland and Groningen were characterized by highly specialized economic activities, made possible by a strong market orientation, a money economy and a well-developed institutional system. This was sometimes accompanied by very high urbanization rates. Even in the countryside, non-food production was important, suggesting a high standard of living. Nevertheless, agricultural production of food by large farmers remained one of the mainstays of the economy. The importance of livestock and arable farming made the control of land not only a critical factor in macroeconomic development, but also of major importance for individual socioeconomic positions and opportunities in the countryside. The commercial market-oriented agriculture and the relatively large farms triggered a process of proletarianization, especially when the population started to grow from the late eighteenth century onwards.

Farms in coastal areas were seldom divided, despite the equal inheritance system. Market-oriented farmers in nineteenth-century Flemish Zeeland, for instance, combined equal inheritances with the indivisibility of farm holdings. They were not firmly attached to their native land. The strong market orientation and the time lag between the marriage of the children and the death of the last living parent forced the wealthiest farmers to acquire a farm for every child elsewhere.¹⁹

18. E. Karel, E. Vanhaute and R. Paping, 'The Low Countries, 1750-2000', in: E. Vanhaute et al. (eds.), *Making a living. Family, income and labour* (forthcoming: Turnhout 2011).

19. P.J. van Cruyningen, *Behoudend maar buigzaam. Boeren in West-Zeeuws-Vlaanderen* (Wageningen 2000).

MAP 1 *Map of the Netherlands showing the division 'inland area' and 'coastal area'*

Groningen farmers can be regarded as quite good representatives of the relatively well-to-do farmers in the coastal regions of the Low Countries. They lived in a society with many landless labourers and numerous people specialized in activities outside agriculture (artisans, merchants, shippers, etc.). However, the property rights of the Groningen farmers on the farmsteads and the land were much stronger compared with other Dutch coastal farmers, who were often tenants with less secure rental contracts. The importance of land use and ownership was reflected in the social structure. Socially, large tenant farmers were directly behind the landowners (nobles, a very limited number of freehold farmers and other landowners). Medium-sized farmers, merchants, millers and more-well-to-do artisans and shopkeepers came next. The bottom of the social structure consisted of numerous indigent artisans,

tradesmen, cottagers and landless labourers.²⁰ In the eighteenth-century Groningen countryside, about half of the married men and women acquired a socioeconomic position (measured on a five-level scale) different from that of their parents, presumably pointing to greater possibilities to shape their own lives in the market-oriented coastal region.²¹

For this article, we studied five adjoining parishes in the Eastern Marne, Kloosterburen, Wierhuizen, Leens, Wehe and Zuurdijk, comprising 391 houses in January 1807, including some 95 farmsteads (5 hectares or more).²² In total, only 138 households worked more than 1 hectare of land, which indicates that about two-thirds of the households were nearly completely landless (labourers, craftsmen, shopkeepers and the like), usually having only a small garden next to the house at their disposal. The occupational structure of the five parishes was quite comparable with the rest of the Groningen clay area, where in 1810 about 23 percent of the adult male population were farmers (including the sons of farmers), 39 percent were labourers or farm hands and 38 percent worked in industry or services.²³

TABLE 1 Farm sizes in Kloosterburen, Wierhuizen, Leens, Wehe and Zuurdijk, 1807

	<i>Small</i> 5-15 ha	<i>Medium-sized</i> 15-30 ha	<i>Large</i> 30-50 ha	<i>Very large</i> 50 + ha	<i>Total</i>
1807	26%	28%	28%	19%	101

NB The figures include six non-farmers using more than 5 hectares (two clergymen, two millers, a cooper and a nobleman).

In the Eastern Marne there were about as many small and medium-sized farms as there were large farms (table 1). In the nineteenth century, farms with more than 5 hectares were large enough to secure an adequate income for a family, and those with 15 hectares and more often needed the extra input of hired labour. The division between several categories of farms did not change much in the period 1750-1850. The number of very large farms rose somewhat due to the creation of polders using new 'outside' dikes.

20. R. Paping, 'Taxes, property size, occupations and social structure, the case of the 18th and 19th century northern Dutch countryside', *Revue Belge d'histoire contemporaine RBHC/BTNG Belgisch Tijdschrift voor nieuwste geschiedenis* 40 (2010) 215-248.

21. Paping, 'Gender and the intergenerational transfer'.

22. The history of all the farmsteads was reconstructed using a wide range of sources, building on previous, less complete publications: I.H. Zijlma, *De boerderijen in de Marne* (Leens 1966) and G. Beukema et al. (eds.), *Gedenkboek nijverheid 1991, deel 2: Boerderijen in de Marne en hun bewoners* (Leens 1991).

23. Paping, *Voor een handvol stuivers*, 68.



Ill. 1 The very large farm Feddemaheerd, situated near Kloosterburen in the Eastern Marne (Groningen), about 1910. Source: Private collection

During the seventeenth century, Groningen farmers and other more well-to-do rural dwellers deliberately arranged marriage contracts in which they explicitly stated that sons and daughters should be treated equally in all respects. This system of equal shares rarely resulted in a division of the parental farm holding, which was frequently taken over by one of the heirs, who in turn compensated the other brothers and sisters. Usually, the marriage contracts gave the surviving partner the usufruct of a share of the inheritance as long as he or she did not remarry. When there were no surviving children after the death of a couple, the heirs of both the bride and groom received a share of the inheritance. The introduction of the Civil Code in 1811 did not change anything in Groningen, because the system of equal inheritances was already in place.

In contrast with the coastal region, the majority of rural families in the inland areas of the Netherlands had a farm of their own, with the exception of the proto-industrial regions. The relatively few agricultural labourers, mainly depending on wage income, had small agricultural holdings. Non-agricultural activities were less developed. Around 1800, most of the agricultural production in large parts of the Dutch provinces of Drenthe, Overijssel, Gelderland and Northern Brabant remained on the farmstead and only

a limited amount was sold, mainly to pay rents and taxes. Because of the restricted market dependence, peasants were presumably less vulnerable to economic swings and the consequences of personal mistakes due to limited farming capabilities. Money was present in such societies, but it was quite scarce. Nevertheless, the urbanization rate in the inland provinces was still considerable compared with other western European countries, although it was significantly lower than in the Dutch coastal provinces.

In the inland regions – where smallholders dominated – it was not uncommon to subdivide the farmland among the children. In order to preserve the parental farm, unmarried brothers and sisters sometimes stayed together (*frèreschets*). More commonly, only one child succeeded to the parental farm, after having paid off his or her sisters and brothers. The chances of social mobility seem to have been rather low in the inland regions, because there were few opportunities to earn an income except as a peasant. The control of land was of great importance for the livelihood of a household, which had to rely partly on inheritances, because the land market was relatively limited. Another possibility was to try to establish a completely new farm. In the Dutch interior with its numerous small-holder farmsteads and its large stretches of uncultivated land, this was easier than in the coastal regions. The situation was even more complex because most of the land in the countryside was usually not owned by the user. Numerous farmsteads and cottages were rented out by landowners, and the hold on the land by these tenants could diverge strongly.

The peasants in Drenthe, consisting of both freeholders and tenants, belong to the large group of inland farmers who usually supplied only a surplus of the agricultural production to the market and who lived in a society with only a limited number of specialized workers outside agriculture. Drenthe stands out compared with other inland regions because of the greater opportunities it offered for land reclamation, its low population pressure, and the absence of proto-industry or of specialization in small-scale, labour-intensive cash crops. A good representative of a traditional agrarian community on sandy soil in Drenthe is the parish of Oosterhesselen.²⁴ This parish comprised four agricultural communities: the villages Oosterhesselen, Gees and Zwinderen and the hamlet of the Klencke. Around 1800, 41 percent of its adult male population consisted of peasant farmers, 38 percent of smallholders or labourers, and 18 percent of craftsmen.²⁵

24. The data on families and farmsteads for Oosterhesselen have been collected as part of a large project on the common life in this parish between 1742 and 1860, mostly executed by a group of volunteers from the Groningen Senioren Academie, whom we would like to thank for their efforts.

25. E.H. Karel and R.F.J. Paping, 'Hofstee in Oosterhesselen. Huwelijkspatronen 1740-1830', *Waardeel. Drents Historisch Tijdschrift* 24 (2004) 1, 22-24.

TABLE 2 *Farm sizes in the parish of Oosterhesselen, 1807*

	<i>Smallholder</i> <i>1-7 ha</i>	<i>Medium-sized small</i> <i>8-13 ha</i>	<i>Medium-sized large</i> <i>14-18 ha</i>	<i>Large</i> <i>19+ ha</i>	<i>Total</i>
1807	52%	31%	5%	12%	94

NB Only cultivated land is taken into account.

The growth of the population in Oosterhesselen (601 inhabitants in 1809) was very slow before 1780, but accelerated somewhat after that year. From 1820 onwards the population increased at a relatively high pace of more than 1 percent yearly, which was about the same growth rate that the Eastern Marne (2177 inhabitants in 1809) experienced from about 1785 onwards. In the nineteenth century the number of small farms in Oosterhesselen increased and the average farm became smaller, while the proportion of smallholders and labourers using only a limited amount of land increased. Presumably, the proportion of artisans and the like also rose somewhat.

In eighteenth-century Drenthe, according to customary law, one of the sons (preferably the eldest) was expected to inherit the farmstead with all the land, while other sons were compensated with an equal value in cash or goods. The daughters of peasants received only a share of the movable property, which was usually already given to them immediately after marriage.²⁶ This equal division between sons may not have always been rigidly enforced, because it was difficult to fix the market value of goods. In addition, valuing the parental holding and the corresponding equipment and livestock too cheaply gave the succeeding son a better start. The division of the parental farmstead was uncommon, although it happened more frequently in Drenthe than in Groningen. In Drenthe a holding usually consisted of numerous small parcels, while Groningen farms often formed a coherent whole. Due to the introduction of the Civil Code, Drenthe peasants had to divide the inheritance equally between sons and daughters, which meant an enormous improvement in the legal position of daughters.

The transfer of farms

To understand the strategies concerning succession, we have to look at the way farms were transferred from one generation to the next. Although the differences between farms in Eastern Marne and in Oosterhesselen were very great, this did not result in notable differences in family succession (table 3).

26. C.H. Edelman, *Harm Tiesing over landbouw en volksleven in Drenthe* (Assen 1974) 11: 74.

TABLE 3 *Recipients of transferred farms in the Eastern Marne (Groningen) and Oosterhesselen (Drenthe), 1740-1860*

	1740-1860 Groningen	1742-1860 Drenthe
Son (married)	15%	21%
Daughter (married)	8%	5%
Unmarried child or children	3%	n.a.
Other near relatives	7%	7%
<i>Total relatives</i>	33%	33%
Widow remarrying	13%	2%
<i>Total remarriages</i>	13%	2%
Unrelated new farmers (sold)	43%	n.a.
Unrelated farmers (rented out)	3%	n.a.
Empty / labourers / disappear.	8%	n.a.
<i>Non-family</i>	54%	61%
Unknown	-	4%
N	584	570

In both regions only a third of the farms went to relatives in the period 1740-1860. The succession chances of sons were slightly better in Drenthe compared with the Eastern Marne, and those of daughters a little less. This difference in gender corresponds to the customary law in Drenthe before 1811, to which the Oosterhesselen peasants might have also adhered after 1811. Women in Drenthe generally had a weaker hold on the farmsteads than in Groningen, as the share of remarrying widows also indicates. In Groningen, farmers' wives usually remained on the farm after losing their partner. Most of them could easily find a new partner. In Drenthe the likelihood of widows remarrying seems to have been considerably lower, and sometimes they had to give up their farmsteads. The loss of the male head reduced the available labour in the household and the ability of exploiting the peasant holding effectively. Before 1811, the peasant widows presumably also had weaker claims on the farmstead, which was mostly financed by the male partners (due to the prevailing unequal inheritance system). The widow could be forced to hand over her farm to a son or to sell it. In a few cases she put a tenant on the farm, but only rarely did a widow remarry. Even the improvement in widows' legal status from 1811 did not have much impact according to the figures. Marrying a widow was not an obvious opportunity for unmarried men in Oosterhesselen who tried to acquire a farmstead. In Groningen, on the contrary, about 13 percent of farms passed to a widow's second husband.

In Groningen and Drenthe the transfer of farms to outsiders was most common. Surprisingly, the figures for Oosterhesselen show a slightly higher tendency for passing a farm to non-relatives. This result does not really mesh

with the standard view of Drenthe as a traditional, non-commercial rural society, characterized by continuity and very limited geographical mobility for its inhabitants. The existing picture of passing farms to the next generation seems to be mainly based on information about large farms and on the situation after 1850.²⁷

An important reason for the limited importance of family succession was the time gap between the death of the parents and the most suitable moment for the children to take over. This timing problem has already been pointed out by Damsma and Kok for nineteenth-century farmers in Akersloot (Holland).²⁸ Sometimes, both parents died too early for children to succeed; however, the more common problem was that parents lived too long. Parents did not leave their farms, and succession was only possible by creating three-generation households, which was not considered a very attractive option.

In Groningen the transfer of farms to non-related families is of greater importance than expected, considering that thanks to the system of '*beklemming*', Groningen farmers and their families had a relatively strong hold on their land compared with adjoining provinces such as Friesland.²⁹ They were not dependent on landowners for the continuation of the use of their farmstead, as was often the case in other parts of the coastal region. Therefore, there is reason to believe that non-family transfers of farmsteads elsewhere in the coastal regions were even more important. This proposition is supported by Damsma's and Kok's research. In Akersloot, parents, especially larger farmers, were more active in trying to preserve a new farm for their young children. Although Damsma and Kok do not give exact figures for farm succession, they suggest that the usually rich farmer secured a farm for his children around the age of marriage, which made it possible for them to marry relatively young. It was often difficult for the children of small farmers to establish themselves as farmers in Akersloot, which corresponds with the low share of family succession of small farmers in the Eastern Marne.

It is possible to compare the Dutch figures of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with those for Belm (Germany). In this Westphalian village between 1711 and 1860, 38 percent of the large and small farms went to male heirs, 13 percent to female heirs, 36 percent to remarrying widows and wid-

27. G.A. Kooy, *De oude samenwoning op het nieuwe platteland: Een studie over de familiehuis-houding in de agrarische Achterhoek* (Assen 1959).

28. Damsma and Kok, 'Ingedroogde harten?', 285-308.

29. W.J. Formsma, *Beklemrecht en landbouw [Historia Agriculturae XIII]* (Groningen 1981). By the end of the eighteenth century, Groningen tenants – owning usually the farm buildings – had obtained the right to use the land connected to these buildings eternally for a fixed money-rent, and they were free to dispose of the land in any way they wanted. See for the differences with Friesland: M. Knibbe, *Lokkich Fryslan. Een studie naar de ontwikkeling van de productiviteit van de Friese landbouw 1505-1830* (Groningen/Wageningen 2006).

owers, and only 13 percent to others.³⁰ Clearly, around 1800 farmers in the Eastern Marne and peasants in Oosterhesselen lived in completely different worlds. Transferring a farmstead to outsiders was very common. The differences may have been related to a higher market dependence of the Groningen farmers and the Drenthe peasants. However, in that case we would also expect a significant difference between the commercial farmers and the less market-oriented peasants, while the only clear distinction is the weaker position of women in Drenthe. The relative chances of female heirs in Groningen were better than in Belm, with its high incidence of family succession. On the peasant farms of Drenthe, it was the other way around: compared to Belm the relative chances of daughters were poorer.

TABLE 4 *Recipients of transferred farms in the Eastern Marne (Groningen), 1740-1860*

	5-15 ha	15-30 ha	30-50 ha	50+ ha	Total
Son (married)	7%	8%	20%	23%	13%
Daughter (married)	7%	8%	9%	4%	7%
Unmarried child or children	1%	1%	3%	7%	2%
Other near relatives	7%	5%	5%	10%	6%
<i>Total relatives</i>	21%	22%	37%	43%	29%
Widow remarrying	12%	9%	12%	14%	12%
Widower remarrying	7%	15%	15%	13%	12%
<i>Total remarriages</i>	19%	24%	27%	27%	24%
Unrelated new farmers (sold)	47%	44%	28%	23%	37%
Unrelated farmers (rented out)	2%	4%	3%	2%	3%
Empty / labourers / disappear.	11%	7%	5%	5%	7%
<i>Non-family</i>	60%	54%	36%	30%	47%
N	177	213	173	104	667

NB See table 3. Remarrying widowers are now also taken into account.

There were very large differences in farm size within both the Eastern Marne in Groningen and Oosterhesselen in Drenthe (tables 4 and 5). Families with large farmsteads in general had a far better social and economic position than smallholders. Family succession played only a lesser role for small and middle-sized farms in Groningen and Drenthe. Selling a farm to outsiders was normal, and the – temporary – disappearance of a farm was also not unusual. However, the larger the farm, the more important family succession was. Despite the small number of cases, it is clear that families were capable of having a stronger grasp on the very large farms in the long run. Sons were clearly preferred as successors – with figures nearing those mentioned for

30. Schlumbohm, *Lebensläufe, Familien, Höfe*, 385

the farms in Belm in Westphalia – but daughters played a relatively minor role. The figures suggest that succession, especially of males, was an ideal which was only attainable for the majority of well-to-do peasants and farmers, because families controlling larger farms were better able to pass their farm to relatives. The comparatively high incidence of (male) family succession on large farms suggest that other families with smaller farms may have wanted to pass their farms on to their children also, but were not able to afford such a strategy. However, it has to be kept in mind that even on the largest farms – leaving aside transfers related to remarriages for the sake of comparison – non-relatives succeeded in 47 percent of the cases in Oosterhesselen, 41 percent of those in the Eastern Marne and only 20 percent of those in Belm.

The large number of takeovers of medium-sized and larger farmsteads in peasant Drenthe by other family members is remarkable. This could partly be due to the eighteenth-century inheritance custom where the farm of a couple with no surviving children could transfer up to the tenth degree within the family, although this cannot completely explain the high figures. They suggest that more well-to-do peasant families were able to actively find solutions to keep farms in the extended family. The figures for Groningen farmers do not show a similar effect, which does not, however, mean that the role of other relatives was negligible.

It is interesting that in Groningen daughters were just as likely as sons to take over small and middle-sized farms (5 to 30 hectares). Sons and daughters seem to have had an equal status on these farms. Selling was by far the most important way of transferring farms, however. A very strong preference for male succession is only clear for the large farms of 30 hectares or more, and especially for very large farms. In Drenthe the situation was different: the chances of daughters succeeding were low both for small and large peasant holdings.

TABLE 5 *Recipients of transferred farms in Oosterhesselen (Drenthe), 1742-1860*

	1-7 ha	8-13 ha	14-18 ha	19+ ha	Unknown	Total
Sons	16%	28%	24%	27%	25%	21%
Daughters	3%	5%	5%	6%	13%	5%
Other relatives	3%	11%	3%	17%	0%	7%
<i>Total relatives</i>	22%	44%	32%	50%	38%	33%
<i>Widow remarrying</i>	2%	1%	0%	2%	13%	2%
<i>Non-family</i>	70%	53%	62%	45%	50%	61%
<i>Unknown</i>	6%	2%	5%	3%	0%	4%
N	288	173	37	64	8	570

NB See table 3.

More than half the farms in the parish of Oosterhesselen were rented out. This must have influenced the very high share of non-family transfers for even medium-sized and large peasant farm holdings. The mobility of families living on these rented farms was quite high. In some cases, unrelated couples would succeed each other every decade. Most of the non-family transfers of large farms occurred on these rented farms. At the same time, some of these farms were rented by the same family for more than a century.³¹ Nevertheless, freehold farms were far more often passed on to the next generation. Of the 41 freehold farmsteads in Oosterhesselen, 73 percent went to relatives (87 percent of those larger than 8 hectares), while of the 62 leasehold farmsteads, only 16 percent were transferred to relatives. The small leasehold farms in particular nearly always were passed to outsiders (32 out of 33). Therefore, despite relatively many small farms being freeholds, the figures for family succession within the smallholders group as a whole were very low. This high incidence of leasehold farms in Oosterhesselen could also explain why transfers to outsiders were more frequent in Drenthe than in Groningen. Because of the stronger claim of the user over a freehold farm, it was easier to keep them in the family. Nearly all farms in Groningen had the characteristics of such freeholds, due to the '*beklemming*' system, with fixed rents providing the farmer with the freedom to dispose of the land.

For the 1807 farmers, we investigated under what circumstances farms were transferred to outsiders. In Groningen there were 42 cases, and the picture is rather diverse. Eight farmers moved to different, often larger farms, six farmers entered an occupation outside of agriculture (widows marrying artisans, but also farmers becoming innkeepers and once a brewer), six farmers retired and sold their farms (three widows, one widower and two couples, all with surviving children, usually including unmarried ones), and four farmers did not have surviving offspring. In one case the heirs, who were all married and comfortably established, rented out their farms. In five cases the inheriting children sold their farms, although one or more of them were still unmarried and in their twenties or early thirties. There are reasons to suspect that in the latter cases, none of the heirs could afford to take over the family farm and compensate his or her brothers and sisters. The largest group were twelve impoverished families – some going bankrupt – who after the sale of their farms had to re-establish themselves as farm labourers. Interestingly, only in eight cases out of 42 (19 percent) did the heirs sell their farms to outsiders, while the other 34 transfers (81 percent) did not take place post-mortem. It was the parents (21 times), or at least one of the parents (13 times), who passed their farms on to outsiders, quite often forced by circumstances, but also in many cases deliberately, for instance to retire in the village.

31. Edelman, *Harm Tiesing*, 11: 75; A. Blaauw, *Westervelde, een Drentse buurtschap; Erven, eigeners en meiers in vroeger eeuwen* (Zuidwolde 1987).



Ill. 2 Farm in Gees (Oosterhesselen) in 1900, giving a good impression of farms in the first half of the nineteenth century. Source: Drents Archief

Unfortunately, our information for Drenthe is less detailed. In 18 cases (29 percent) the farms went to outsiders after the death of both parents. In about half the cases, there were no surviving children, while in the others all the children were already married and had established themselves some years previously. In 44 cases (71 percent) the parents, or at least one of them, passed the farmstead to non-relatives. Sometimes peasants, for instance widows, were forced to give up their farm holdings, but in most cases it was simply peasants, especially smallholders, moving from one farmstead to the next – a kind of behaviour we will term ‘farm-hopping’. In Oosterhesselen, they moved within a range of 20 km around the parish.³² Even though the many smallholders/leaseholders in Drenthe had a slightly higher social status than labourers, their actual economic status did not differ much. Many of them switched from smallholder to labourer and back several times in their lives, moving from one smallholding to another. What role the landowners played in this frequent moving around is not really clear.

32. E. Karel and R. Paping, ‘Migratie en migratiemotieven in Oosterhesselen in de eerste helft van de negentiende eeuw’, *Waardeel. Drents Historisch Tijdschrift* 31:1 (2011) 6-13.

Farm-hopping could also play a role in the strategies of children of richer farmers or peasants, who in the early years after marriage lived on small farms and tried to move to large farm holdings. Sometimes a couple might find the opportunity to take over a parental farm, but more often the acquisition of a larger farmstead depended on the receipt of an inheritance. The purchase of a larger farm could be a sign of the upward social mobility of a successful farmer or peasant. In the parish of Oosterhesselen, many peasant couples started their farming career in Gees. In this village, smallholder farms dominated and obviously such a farmstead was easier and cheaper to acquire. In Drenthe, the starting problems of new couples could also be solved by temporarily splitting a large farmstead – both the house and the land. Another reason for the farm-hopping strategy may have been the employment of grown-up children on reaching ‘working age’. More land and a bigger farmstead became attractive once the children could work. This reason for farm-hopping and farm division was only of importance for the peasants in Drenthe – where agriculture was mainly based on family labour – and not for the farmers in Groningen, where a large portion of the agricultural work was done by labourers and live-in servants.

The offspring of farmers and peasants

To investigate more closely the career possibilities of the children of the Groningen farmers and the Drenthe peasants, this article will concentrate on those families in control of a farm around 1807. All the children of such couples at that time were considered, including children from earlier or later marriages. In the very few cases where unmarried children were living together on a farm, the offspring of their parents was taken into consideration. As a result, we analysed the data for families living on 95 farms in the Eastern Marne and 103 farms in Oosterhesselen. The farm holdings in Oosterhesselen also include those farms where the head of household supplemented his income with non-agricultural activities.

The total number of children per farm was significantly higher in Groningen than in Drenthe. There are several reasons for this difference. The most important factor was the three to four years lower average age at first marriage of farmer women in the Eastern Marne. This must have resulted in a significantly higher number of children, although this effect was weakened somewhat by the higher death rates of males and females in their twenties to forties in Groningen. In addition, more farmers remarried in the Eastern Marne, which often resulted in larger families. Moreover, the definitely higher infant mortality in this region would have reduced the intervals between births somewhat compared to Drenthe.

TABLE 6 *Children of farmers living around 1807 in the Eastern Marne and of peasants living in Oosterhesselen*

	Eastern Marne (Groningen)		Oosterhesselen (Drenthe)	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Died before 18	34%	30%	20%	19%
Died unmarried 18-29	5%	3%	6%	3%
Died unmarried 30+	7%	1%	16%	6%
Married	54%	66%	57%	72%
Unknown (N)	7	3	13	15
Total children (N)	320	288	274	235
Average per farm	3.4	3.0	2.7	2.3
'Survivors' per farm	2.0	2.0	1.9	1.7

NB The category 'Died before 18' also includes some presumed dead. Omitted from the table are three children of unknown gender in Groningen and thirteen in Drenthe, all of whom died unbaptized. Survivors include those children who married and those unmarried children who reached at the least the age of 30.

One social problem looms large from table 6. The average number of children for these farmer families was very high, even if we take into account the high infant and juvenile mortality rates: 3.6 children (Drenthe) or even 4.0 children (Groningen) were themselves capable of starting a household. It is quite clear that only slightly more than half of these children in theory could become a successor of their parents or marry such a successor. However, as we have seen from our previous analysis, the majority of the farms in Drenthe and Groningen were not passed to the next generation at all. Table 7 shows what happened to the farms.³³ In Groningen, only 16 percent of sons (31 out of 191) and 8 percent of daughters (15 out of 192) succeeded their parents. In Drenthe, 17 percent of sons (32 out of 192) and only 3 percent of daughters (5 out of 172) took over their parents' farm. These percentages slightly underestimate the possibilities for children to succeed their parents, because some succeeded to a previous or later farm inhabited by their parents. However, the Groningen data shows that this kind of succession was rare.

It is clear that there is not much point in trying to link the household formation processes of a new generation to family succession in the Dutch countryside, especially taking into account that most children succeeding to parental farms did not take over their farm at their marriage date and also

33. The lower share of transfers to non-relatives in Groningen compared to table 3 (presenting all transfers) was caused by the low turnover of farms with a high family continuity.

did not form a three-generation household after their marriage. Nevertheless, Table 7 shows that, notwithstanding the overall rather limited chances of family succession, there were some striking differences between Groningen and Drenthe. In Drenthe, the sons who succeeded were usually the eldest, suggesting a preference for a kind of primogeniture, whereas in Groningen younger sons were as likely as older ones to inherit. Although the number of cases involved is very limited, the differences between Groningen and Drenthe are statistically significant. These differences are only partly explained by the Oosterhesselen peasants having fewer younger sons. Further research into the suggested strong preference of Drenthe peasants for their eldest sons as successors seems necessary.

TABLE 7 *Successors of the inhabitants of farmsteads in 1807 in the Eastern Marne and Oosterhesselen*

	<i>Eastern Marne (Groningen)</i>	<i>Oosterhesselen (Drenthe)</i>
First son	17%	23%
Other son	16%	8%
Daughters	16%	5%
Other relatives	7%	4%
Outsiders	44%	60%
N	95	103

What did influence the household formation of the new generation if direct succession on the parental farm was less common? Looking at the figures, it seems that in Drenthe household formation by sons in particular may frequently have been hampered by a lack of resources. About 22 percent of the grown-up peasant sons did not marry at all.³⁴ In Groningen, this share (12 percent) was considerably smaller. In both regions, farmer daughters had far more success on the marriage market: in Drenthe 8 percent of the daughters remained unmarried, while in Groningen this was a mere 1 percent.

Unmarried sons and daughters in Groningen were not very special: they did not come from large families,³⁵ nor did their parental farm remain more often in the family. They were quite evenly divided over the different farm sizes, and they did not have a specific position/rank within the parental family. In Drenthe, family size also did not influence a person's chances of remaining

34. In the nominator we used the sum of married children and those unmarried children surviving until after the age of 30.

35. The average number of married children and celibates in their families was 4.8, while in general it was 5.3 for surviving children.

unmarried. Celibacy was, however, relatively high in freehold families (21 percent) compared to leasehold families (13 percent), and sons and daughters of medium-sized and large farmers (24 percent) remained single more often than those of smallholders (14 percent). Therefore, it seems that among the more well-to-do peasants in Drenthe, the celibacy of some of the daughters, but especially of the sons, could have been used to protect the family property and enhance the fortunes of their brothers and sisters. Though it has to be borne in mind that children originating from these families had greater difficulties of reaching the same socioeconomic levels as their parents, which ultimately could have resulted in a greater chance of a lifelong postponement of marriage. It does not seem to have been an insurmountable problem for most couples in Drenthe to lay hands on a smallholder farmstead, but to acquire a substantial farm was much more difficult in this period of population growth and fragmentation of farmsteads.

We also encounter indications of marriage postponement when considering the average age at marriage. Theoretically, the difficulty of obtaining a farmstead directly after marriage, combined with a preference for neolocality, made it attractive to postpone marriage for both farmers' and peasants' children alike. Waiting to marry could improve the chances of a better farmstead. In Drenthe, in particular, most new couples needed a peasant farmstead, because there were not many alternatives for earning an income. The larger a household's resources, the better a farm they could acquire. Presumably, in Drenthe these resources continued to increase for men until their early thirties, thanks to accumulated wages, rising creditworthiness and a greater chance of obtaining at least part of an inheritance. For women, these factors were less important. Their money earnings were lower, and their capabilities were presumably of lesser value for the creditworthiness of the couple. At least before 1811, they had often already received their share of the parental inheritance upon marriage.

TABLE 8 *Average age at first marriage of children of farmers in the Eastern Marne and of peasant families in Oosterhesselen around 1807*

	Sons				Daughters			
	Marne farmers		Oosterhesselen peasants		Marne farmers		Oosterhesselen peasants	
	Age	N	Age	N	Age	N	Age	N
Small	30.2	44	30.9	81	25.4	43	28.0	88
Medium	28.8	48	31.7	44	23.9	60	26.5	48
Large	28.2	48	36.7	6	25.3	49	28.6	5
Very large	27.0	29	36.2	19	23.0	35	25.3	17
Total	28.7	169	32.0	150	24.5	187	27.3	158

Looking at the figures (table 8), the marriage postponement argument seems to have been of far more importance in Drenthe than in Groningen, where average ages at marriage were considerably lower. The sons of peasants with large holdings in Oosterhesselen stand out in particular with an average age at marriage of 36. This is the same group for which celibacy was extremely high. Again, this suggests either the postponement of marriage for the sake of attaining an improved position, or the tendency of well-to-do peasant sons in Drenthe to protect their family property by not marrying. In contrast, the daughters of the largest farmers were the youngest to marry in Oosterhesselen. Possibly, their weaker position relative to the family property gave them greater freedom to marry.

In Groningen, the reverse was the case: the larger the farm, the younger sons seemed to marry. Sons of smallholders with an average age at marriage of 30 were most likely to postpone their marriage to improve their chances of a reasonable livelihood. Sons from families with large and very large farms in Groningen married on average a somewhat astounding 8 to 9 years earlier than sons originating from the largest farms in Drenthe. Postponement was unnecessary for the Groningen farmers, as waiting did not substantially increase their chances of acquiring a farm. At a certain age it was quite clear whether a person had the capability and the money to become a farmer. The resources (farming capacity, available capital, creditworthiness to borrow from family or outsiders) that a couple required to obtain a farmstead did not increase much past a certain age. The picture of daughters of Groningen farmers is not clear, with daughters of very large farmers marrying younger than daughters of large farmers. Daughters of medium-sized farmers, however, were slightly younger at marriage than those of larger and of very large farmers. On the whole, the daughters of Groningen farmers married on average nearly three years earlier than their counterparts in Drenthe.

TABLE 9 *Number of children and farm size in 1807 of farmers living in Oosterhesselen*

	1-7 ha	8-13 ha	14+ ha
Died before 18	20%	22%	14%
Died unmarried 18-29	4%	5%	5%
Died unmarried 30+	9%	13%	16%
Married	66%	59%	64%
Unknown	17	7	2
<i>Total children</i>	271	163	75
<i>Number of farms</i>	59	28	16
Average per farm	4.6	5.8	4.7
'Survivors' per farm	3.2	4.0	3.7
'Married' per farm	2.8	3.3	2.9

On all farms in Groningen and Drenthe, there was a substantial average surplus of children reaching marriageable age (tables 9 and 10). Only on the very small farms in Oosterhesselen did the number of surviving children seem to have been slightly lower. In general, there were somewhat fewer surviving children in Oosterhesselen. Moreover, the high incidence of celibacy lessened the surplus of children to a certain extent, especially for the medium-sized and large farms. Nevertheless, even in Oosterhesselen the next generation was about 50 percent as large, which explains the considerable population growth from the end of the eighteenth century onwards. In the Eastern Marne the new generation of farmers was nearly twice as large. However, we have to bear in mind that Groningen farmers, in contrast to Drenthe peasants, were only a minority of the population, and there are strong indications that the reproduction rates of the other population groups in the Groningen countryside were much lower.³⁶ Consequently, the total population growth in the Eastern Marne was not much higher than in Oosterhesselen.

TABLE 10 *Number of children and farm size in the Eastern Marne around 1807*

	5-15 ha	15-30 ha	30-50 ha	50+ ha
Died before 18	27%	30%	31%	41%
Died unmarried 18-29	2%	4%	7%	2%
Died unmarried 30+	4%	4%	5%	4%
Married	67%	62%	57%	52%
Unknown (N)	3	-	4	1
Total children (N)	133	175	173	123
Number of farms (N)	20	29	29	17
Average per farm	6.7	6.0	6.0	7.2
'Survivors' per farm	4.6	4.0	3.7	4.1
'Married' per farm	4.4	3.8	3.3	3.8

The children of farmers in Groningen had serious problems finding suitable positions after marriage, because the number of farms did not increase. Not everybody was able to obtain a farm, and the children of the large and very large farmers won the competition for the limited available farmsteads. These children formed the bulk of the new occupants of the numerous farms that were transferred to non-relatives (tables 3-5). A mere quarter of the small-holders' children were able to secure a farm. Their position was extremely

36. R. Paping and G. Collenteur, 'Population growth and social structure in a market-oriented agricultural economy in the Netherlands 1750-1820', *Obradoiro de Historia Moderna* 13 (2004) 75-99.

insecure, and they often ended up as landless farm labourers. The resources of the children of large and very large farmers were much more extensive; they not only controlled more capital from the start, but they also had much better prospects of inheriting substantial extra funds. The financial position of the children of small farmers was usually far worse. An inheritance often had to be divided between many children. However, such an inheritance was usually their only chance of becoming farmer, as about half of the children of smallholders who managed to become a farmer succeeded on the parental farm, and it also should be taken into account that some of the other children married successors.

TABLE 11 *Occupation of married children of 1807 farmers or their male partners around five years after marriage in Eastern Marne*

	5-15 ha	15-30 ha	30-50 ha	50+ ha
Farmers	26%	41%	69%	67%
[of whom successors]	[14%]	[9%]	[17%]	[14%]
Labourers	44%	33%	10%	8%
'Middle class'	30%	26%	21%	25%
N	87	109	97	64

In Drenthe, the chances of acquiring a farmstead were also much poorer for the children of smallholders than for those from the larger farms (table 12), though the situation was much less pronounced than in Groningen. Compared to the small farmers in Groningen, the children of the smallholders had particularly good chances of becoming farmers (*landbouwers*), according to the official population records, owing to the greater availability of farmsteads in Drenthe, whose numbers continued to increase considerably in the nineteenth century.

TABLE 12 *Occupation of the married children of 1807 farmers or their male partners around five years after marriage in Oosterhesselen*

	1-7 ha	8-13 ha	14+ ha
Farmers	45%	52%	64%
Labourers	25%	18%	11%
'Middle class'	24%	14%	15%
Unknown	7%	15%	11%
N	169	92	47

Both in Groningen and Drenthe, up to half of the children of farmers and peasants occupied 'middle class' positions or became labourers. Although these high figures might suggest that large numbers of rural children migrated to

cities and towns, this was absolutely not the case.³⁷ Numerous children of farmers and peasants moved to other places, but these were nearly always villages in the neighbourhood. This is not very remarkable, as the Netherlands was undergoing a very long period of de-urbanization, with a continuously increasing share of the population until the mid-nineteenth century, indicating that the cities were not very attractive as places to settle.³⁸ Even the city of Groningen attracted only a few farmers' children from the Eastern Marne and Oosterhesselen.

Family background

How did the family composition influence succession and social mobility patterns? In Groningen, the children who married had on average 4.3 surviving brothers and sisters (N=357), but of those who succeeded their parents, the number is only 3.2 (N=50). In Drenthe these figures are 3.6 (N=208) and 2.9 (N=119), respectively. Children who were able to succeed their parents came from slightly smaller families and thus were usually entitled to a somewhat larger share of the inheritance. This raises the question of whether the number of children reaching marriageable age indeed influenced the children's chances. We can only provide an answer for Groningen. Indeed, those who became labourers had 4.6 surviving brothers and sisters, while farmers had 4.0, and the middle class had 4.9. Therefore, the figures suggest a slight tendency towards downward social mobility for those originating from larger families. The fact that farmers' children who joined the middle class to become artisans, merchants, millers and such were particularly likely to come from relatively large families suggests that some of these families deliberately chose a career outside agriculture, by investing in the necessary capabilities at least for their sons, to diminish the risk of their ending up as poor labourers without a farm.

Table 13 shows that, in Groningen, passing the farm to outsiders strongly limited the children's chances of economic success. Just over a quarter of them managed to become farmers again. If a family could afford to have one child take over the farm, the chances of their brothers and sisters becoming comfortably established were pretty good. Nearly three-quarters of them acquired a farm after marrying, although it seems that passing a farm to a daughter diminished her brothers' and sisters' chances. We have already seen that small and medium-sized farmers in particular were often succeeded by

37. See also: Karel and Paping, 'Migratie'; R. Paping, 'Family strategies concerning migration and occupations of children in a market-oriented agricultural economy', *The History of the Family* 9 (2004) 159-191, 171.

38. Karel, Vanhaute and Paping, 'The Low Countries'.

daughters and that the children from these farms ran the greatest risk of downward social mobility (tables 4 and 11).

TABLE 13 *Occupations of married children or their partners around five years after marriage related to what happened to the parental farm in the Eastern Marne*

<i>What happened to the children?</i>	<i>What happened to the parental farm?</i>				<i>Farm sold</i>
	<i>Succeeded by first son</i>	<i>Succeeded by other son</i>	<i>Succeeded by daughter</i>	<i>Succeeded by other relatives</i>	
Became successor	38%	21%	26%	-	-
Became farmer elsewhere	33%	57%	31%	71%	28%
Became labourer	7%	6%	16%	6%	43%
Became 'middle class'	21%	15%	28%	24%	30%
N (children)	42	71	58	17	169
N (farms)	16	15	15	7	42
Married per farm	2.6	4.7	3.9	2.4	4.0

TABLE 14 *Occupations of married children or their partners around five years after marriage related to what happened to the parental farm in Oosterhesselen*

<i>What happened to the children?</i>	<i>What happened to the parental farm?</i>				<i>Farm sold</i>
	<i>Succeeded by first son</i>	<i>Succeeded by other son</i>	<i>Succeeded by daughter</i>	<i>Succeeded by other relatives</i>	
Became successor	26%	27%	42%	-	-
Became farmer elsewhere	38%	32%	50%	55%	47%
Became labourer	7%	18%	0%	9%	28%
Became 'middle class'	12%	18%	8%	18%	17%
Unknown	17%	5%	0%	18%	8%
N (children)	76	22	12	11	185
N (farms)	24	8	5	4	62
Married per farm	3.2	2.8	2.4	2.8	3.0

The situation was somewhat different in Drenthe. Taking into account the rather low figures, it is obvious that the chances of becoming a farmer were less dramatically influenced by the transfer of the parental farmstead to non-relatives than in Groningen. There were simply fewer opportunities in Drenthe to find a different occupation than farmer in the first half of the nineteenth century. As noted before, even most 'middle-class' households were engaged in agricultural activities. For peasants, the acquisition of an agricultural holding seemed to have been a quite natural event, which possibly depended less on paternal capital and personal qualities than it did for the Groningen farmers. Nevertheless, the chances of becoming a labourer were also significantly higher in Drenthe when the parental farm was handed over to a non-relative.

We also investigated whether there was a relationship between the average age at first marriage and the ultimate occupation of the children of farmers and peasants; however, the differences were rather small. Only the sons of Drenthe peasants who themselves became labourers were at 27.9 years (N=37) significantly younger than average (32.0 years, N=150). This indicates that marrying early could have a negative influence on this group. For men, postponing marriage seems to have had a positive effect on their chances of obtaining some kind of farm in Drenthe. For the peasants' daughters, this effect is not discernible, suggesting that for women, accumulating resources in their twenties was of lesser importance to their later socioeconomic position. In Groningen, the differences in the average age at marriage in both the farmers' sons and daughters were small, which could suggest that the decision when to marry was not really related to the chances of downward mobility. Acquiring extra resources as unmarried persons in their twenties did not have important effects on a person's ultimate position in this market-oriented economy.

TABLE 15 *Occupation of married children or their partners in the Eastern Marne around five years after marriage related to the circumstances under which a farm was sold*

	<i>Move to other farm</i>	<i>Becoming middle class</i>	<i>Retired</i>	<i>Impoverished</i>	<i>Sold by heirs</i>
Farmers	54%	37%	23%	10%	26%
Labourers	18%	32%	23%	66%	61%
'Middle class'	28%	32%	53%	24%	13%
N (children)	39	19	30	58	23
N (farms)	8	6	6	12	6
Married per farm	4.9	3.2	5.0	4.8	3.8

Clearly, the transfer of the parental farm to outsiders strongly affected the socioeconomic position of the children. For that reason, it is very interesting to investigate the circumstances under which these transfers took place. For Drenthe, we do not have very detailed information of why families sold or left their parental farm, except that in 8 cases there were simply no children and in 6 cases the children had already found a farm elsewhere and had no intention of returning to their parental farm. Fortunately, we do have more detailed information for Groningen concerning the reasons for selling a farm (table 15).

We could expect that the chances of becoming a farmer were the best for those whose parents moved to a different, usually larger, farm. Nevertheless, their chances were less than those not moving at all and whose farm remained in the family (compare table 13). This could suggest that 'hopping' from one farm to another did not always turn out to be a very good strategy.

The six farmers in the Eastern Marne changing to 'middle-class' positions had become shopkeepers, innkeepers and merchants. All these occupations required considerably lower investments than a farm and did not require specialist capabilities. Presumably, this step was taken to avoid complete impoverishment, a proposition which is supported by the decrease in the prospects of their descendants, who relatively often became labourers, while many of these children also occupied 'middle-class' positions themselves.

Selling a farm because of retirement also did not turn out very well for the children. It seriously diminished their chances of becoming farmers themselves, which suggests that at that time, these decisions were not a sign of great financial strength. Presumably, there was enough money to provide the retiring parents with a few comfortable last years, but it also meant that their children had to find occupations which required lower investments. This clarifies why so many of the children of retired farmers showed up in the 'middle class'. The more well-to-do retiring farmers usually passed their farms to one of their children and did not sell it.

Insolvency was the greatest danger to farmers. This nearly always resulted in the transfer of the farmstead to unrelated people. There are many examples of creditors in Groningen no longer wanting to wait for their payments. In a commercial money economy like rural Groningen, people could easily fail financially. If a farming couple was less capable than other farmers, they would have an increased chance of losing their farm. In less commercial Drenthe, on the other hand, insolvency seems to have been more often related to demographic disasters in the household (loss of the male partner) or to ageing smallholders who were no longer capable of providing for themselves.

The prospects of the children of impoverished Groningen farmers were not very good, as table 15 shows. Losing social status and the prospects of a decent inheritance meant that their chances of a well-to-do existence shrank considerably. Surprisingly, the same number of small farms, medium-sized farms and large farms fell into financial difficulties. The decision to sell a farm after the death of the parents was also often a sign that the children were in an unfavourable position and needed money. In some cases, the parents managed to keep hold of a farm, while in the meantime all the married children became labourers. The few impoverished farmers and those whose heirs had sold their farm (17 out of 95) accounted for 58 percent (52 out of 89) of the farmers' children who became labourers. This is a clear sign that the circumstances of the parental family usually determined the social chances of the children in Groningen. Children were put in an unfortunate career position when their parents lost their farm or tried to keep it at all costs.

The high incidence of the transfer of farms to outsiders was about as important as the large discrepancy between the number of children and the number of parental economic positions due to the high rural population growth in the first half of the nineteenth century, as becomes clear from the

summary of our results in table 16. To become a successor or to marry a successor was not unimportant. However, it was by no means the only way for a young couple to acquire a farmstead in the two regions. In both rural societies – Groningen and Drenthe – family succession certainly was not the rule, as between 1740 and 1860 more than half the transfers of farmsteads took place between non-relatives. Continuity within one family was not an infrequent phenomenon, but in more cases the farms were sold or rented to outsiders. A more detailed analysis clarifies that in both societies it was the richest households – in Groningen the large farmers and in Oosterhesselen the large and the freehold peasants – who could afford to adhere to a strategy of family succession. Even in these cases, a farm was often sold to outsiders compared to international standards. The very low family continuity of leasehold farms in Drenthe in this period points to the existence of quite a competitive market for these usually small leases, the kind of market which had already existed in some other parts of the Netherlands a few centuries before.³⁹

TABLE 16 *Occupational position of ‘surviving’ children of farmers in the Eastern Marne and of peasants in Oosterhesselen around 1806*

	<i>Eastern Marne (Groningen)</i>	<i>Oosterhesselen (Drenthe)</i>
Succession of parents or parents-in-law (married)	25%	17%
Acquisition of a farmstead differently (married)	21%	25%
‘Middle class’ (married)	23%	17%
Labourers (married)	23%	18%
Unknown (married)	-	8%
Permanent celibates (aged 30 and older)	7%	15%
N	383	363

NB The number of those marrying a successor has been estimated to be equal to the number of successors. Successors also include those succeeding after more than 5 years of marriage; other occupational positions are measured about five years after marriage.

Concluding remarks

If we take Groningen farmers and Drenthe peasants as representatives of the very market-oriented Dutch coastal farmers and the rather less market-oriented Dutch inland peasants, there are strong indications to suggest that the role played by family succession in Dutch farmsteads was relatively limited compared with other Western European rural societies. Data for the Eastern Marne and Oosterhesselen around 1800 show that in more than half the

39. Van Bavel and Hoppenbrouwers, ‘Landholding and land transfer’, 31-32.

cases, farms were transferred to non-relatives, which is much higher than in, for instance, nearby Westphalia. A possible reason for this difference is that both regions were more fully integrated into the market, partly due to the vicinity of the European core region of Holland. As the Drenthe peasants were much less market-oriented, their freehold farms did indeed remain within the family far more often than the Groningen freehold farms. However, the majority of peasants in Oosterhesselen had rather insecure leaseholds farms, with the result that the total share of the farmsteads which were transferred to outsiders was about the same in both regions.

The data on the frequent transfer of farms to outsiders also indicate that the acquisition of the parental holding was a far less decisive factor in the rural household formation of the new generation than has often been suggested. The role of family succession in household formation was restricted even further in a period of rapid population growth such as the one studied. The average number of children in every household surviving to marriageable age was quite high from the late eighteenth century onwards. In market-oriented rural Groningen, where farmers formed a relatively wealthy minority of the population and the number of farmsteads was quite stable, the problems for the next generation were the greatest. These problems were the result of a not very restrictive marriage pattern for farmers, resulting in a relatively high average number of surviving children. Consequently, half of the Groningen farmers' children were unable to acquire a farm themselves. The situation for peasants' children in rural Drenthe, where nearly all the households used at least some land, was only slightly more favourable, owing to the increasing number of farmsteads. In addition, the average number of surviving children per household in Drenthe was lower, mainly due to the much higher average ages at marriage. This high age postponed the moment children needed a farmstead for their own household, and was accompanied by a relatively high permanent celibacy rate for men. Both elements decreased the shortage of farmsteads in Drenthe.

A reason why family succession may not have been a favourable strategy in the two societies is because it involved certain social and individual costs. It is quite problematical demographically, when parents must retire at a relatively young age, or where the average age at marriage must be far above 30, or where most young couples must start their married life living with one or both parents for a long period. This latter situation of extended households could only be avoided by settling elsewhere, or in other words by acquiring a niche somewhere else.⁴⁰ Early retirement means a loss of income, while high average ages at marriage and living in extended households may result in a

40. G. Fertig, 'The Hajnal hypothesis before Hajnal', in: T. Engelen and A.P. Wolf (eds.), *Marriage and the family in Eurasia. Perspectives on the Hajnal hypothesis* (Amsterdam 2005) 37-48.

loss of freedom for young adults. Taking this into account, the actual importance of family succession in a society is to a great extent dependent on what the individual and the family needs (preferences or goals) are and the extent to which socioeconomic circumstances permits the fulfilment of these needs.

An in-depth analysis of the reasons for selling Groningen farms also shows quite different reasons such as impoverishment, childlessness, the inheriting children lacking capital to continue a farm, and the desire for a larger farm. In Drenthe, many of the frequent transfers of farmsteads between non-related families concerned smallholders living on leased farmsteads moving around. In both societies there seems to have been a clear relationship between downward social mobility and transferring the farmstead to outsiders. This relationship was the strongest in Groningen, where the 18 percent of farmsteads that were sold by impoverished parents or by their heirs had been home to 58 percent of the children who ended up as farm labourers. These figures suggest that the downward intergenerational social mobility of farmers' children was largely caused by previous downward intragenerational social mobility of the parents. Children from families who managed to keep the farm in the family were much more successful, whether they were successors or not.

Although the similarities between Groningen and Drenthe are quite numerous, there were some striking differences. In Drenthe, there was a stronger preference for the succession of the eldest son, which was completely absent in Groningen. In addition, the chances of daughters succeeding were much lower in Drenthe. However, it was mainly on the small and medium-sized Groningen farms that the chances of daughters equalled those of sons. Large and very large Groningen farms were usually taken over by a son. Furthermore, the position of widows was much stronger in Groningen than in Drenthe. They were very often able to retain the farm after remarriage – which was also the case in Belm in Westphalia, for instance – while in Drenthe widows usually left the farmstead. Possibly, the poor position of women in Drenthe was related to their weaker legal position before 1811, and which lived on in a variety of traditional cultural notions.

Another marked difference is the average age at marriage. The need to accumulate resources in the form of farming capabilities, creditworthiness and capital (saved wages and inheritances) possibly stimulated the male peasants in Drenthe to postpone marriage to improve their position on the market for farmsteads. The more well-to-do a peasant was – whether a freehold peasant or a peasant with a large holding – the later his sons would marry and the higher the relative number of celibate sons. Interesting in this respect is the low age at marriage of peasant sons who became labourers, suggesting that an early marriage and thus less time to accumulate resources greatly increased the chances of downward social mobility in Drenthe. In Groningen, the opposite was true, as it was the sons of the largest farmers who on average married at the youngest age. For this group, postponement of marriage

seemed not to have had many advantages, because the wealthier they were, the easier they could settle down. For peasant daughters in Drenthe, average ages at marriage were high, while for farm daughters in Groningen they were considerably lower. In either case there was no clear relationship with social origin and social prospects.

In this article we have seen that keeping the farm in the family was an important success factor for all the children of that household. However, this factor does not explain everything. The specific context, circumstances and opportunities of a family seemed to have been decisive in decisions regarding who would take over the farm or whether the farm was sold or transferred in a different way. The many different stories of the farmer families and their children that we studied illustrate that the family 'strategy' was usually made 'around the kitchen table'. We did not analyse individual cases in this article, because we first wanted to explore some general patterns. Our next step will be to study in greater depth the family factors that influenced downward social mobility, for instance the number of siblings a person had, his or her position within a family, parental remarriage, time of death of parents, and migration behaviour.

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